

Southeast Asia Development Advisory Group

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SEADAG REPORTS

COUNCIL ON VIETNAMESE STUDIES

February 13, 1970
Asia House, New York

SEADAG Reports are intended to inform the reader of the participants, agenda, support materials provided, and the major conclusions of SEADAG meetings. They are meant in no way to recapitulate discussions, nor specify the contributions of participants. In some cases, transcriptions of meetings are available on a limited distribution basis.

MEETING OF: SEADAG Council on Vietnamese Studies

TIME AND PLACE: February 13, 1970
Asia House

PARTICIPANTS: Joseph J. Zasloff, Chairman, University of Pittsburgh

Leland Barrows, Research Analysis Corporation
Edward C. Britton, Sacramento State College
John C. Donnell, Temple University
Dan Ellsberg, The RAND Corporation
Wesley R. Fishel, Southern Illinois University
Charles P. Fossum, VN/ND, AID
Allan E. Goodman, Harvard University
William D. Henderson, University of Pittsburgh (Rapporteur)
Robert H. Nooter, AA/EA, AID
Guy J. Pauker, The RAND Corporation
Ithiel de Sola Pool, Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Samuel L. Popkin, Harvard University
James D. Rosenthal, EA/VN, Department of State
I. Milton Sacks, Brandeis University
Robert Scigliano, State University of New York, Buffalo
Jerry M. Silverman, McMaster University
Philip I. Sperling, VN/REIR, AID
William H. Sullivan, EA, Department of State
Phillips Talbot, The Asia Society
Alexander B. Woodside, Harvard University
David O. D. Wurfel, University of Windsor
Kenneth T. Young, The Asia Society

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February 13, 1970
Asia House

Report of Meeting

The Chairman announced the retirement of The Honorable Kenneth T. Young as President of the Asia Society and Chairman of SEADAG and his new association with the Council on Foreign Relations. Appreciation and gratitude for Mr. Young's assistance to the seminar were expressed, and his successor, Dr. Phillips Talbot, was introduced.

Presentations

Vietnam and U.S. Policy: A Current Appraisal.

William Sullivan opened his remarks by contrasting the United States' perception of a threatening "monolithic and fanatic" communism in Asia during the early 1950s with the less menacing view of today. Problems on the west boundaries of China and progress by the countries on China's littoral have contributed to this new perception.

The contrast between these two viewpoints helps to explain the basis of the Nixon Doctrine. There now seems to be no justifiable reason to maintain a large American presence in Southeast Asia. These countries must adjust independently of the United States to the current situation there.

Focusing specifically on Vietnam, Ambassador Sullivan pointed out that President Nixon intends to withdraw American combat troops as rapidly as possible. The United States is prepared to disengage by negotiating a settlement in Paris, and by proceeding with the Vietnamization program. Prospects for a negotiated settlement appear dim at present, however, several advantages for the United States were noted with regard to Vietnamization:

1. the North Vietnamese may agree to negotiate a settlement rather than face a stronger South Vietnam later;
2. the NVA does not now have the military capability to mount an offensive similar to the 1968 Tet offensive;
3. infiltration levels to the south are down, indicating that the enemy is not yet attempting to achieve the military capability to mount an offensive;
4. the ARVN has greatly increased its potentiality to protect the Vietnamization program, however desertion remains a problem for mobile ARVN units.

Nevertheless, a limited but dramatic communist effort may be attempted before the rainy season in order to destroy ARVN units (thereby striking at the Vietnamization concept), to disrupt successful pacification programs, and/or to increase American casualties.

Referring to the political situation within Vietnam, Ambassador Sullivan indicated that an earlier trend toward unifying the non-communist political groups has waned during the past year. He concluded that President Thieu's dealings with various non-communist political forces within South Vietnam has been less than adroit from the United States' point of view. President Thieu seems to be relying on restructuring the village political organization and uniting it with his administration while skipping the middle bureaucracy, the National Assembly, and other Saigon based groups.

In summary, Vietnamization rather than negotiation appears to be the likely means of ending American involvement in Vietnam. The North Vietnamese will eventually determine a method of meeting this threat, thus, the test of Vietnamization is yet to come.

The discussion following Ambassador Sullivan's presentation dealt primarily with internal South Vietnamese politics, especially the South Vietnamese government's ability and willingness to broaden its political base. *Law!*

The Vietnamese House of Representatives.

Allan Goodman's study seeks to determine the impact which the Lower House has and is likely to have as an agent of development and as a political factor within Vietnamese politics. The study is based on an examination of House debate records, personal interviews, and visits to ten provinces to investigate deputy-constituent relations.

Mr. Goodman classified 40 deputies as active (they made regular visits to their constituencies, participated frequently in House debate, voted regularly, and demonstrated a serious interest in the business of the House) and the remaining 97 as inactive. Conclusions about the impact of the House on development and its role in Vietnamese politics are based on observations of these active members.

Although the efficacy of the active deputies in promoting development varies from province to province, they function regularly as a direct link between the village and provincial levels of government. Three patterned relationships of particular significance were noted in this village-province interaction:

1. a hostile relationship between the deputy and provincial officials (the usual cause of which was provincial corruption which would result in the deputy's "corruption removal campaign" and his attempt to replace or reform the province chief);
2. a mutual cooperation between the deputy and provincial officials, often initiated and encouraged by an American advisor;
3. a reformed relationship evolving out of former hostilities (in exchange for a laissez-faire attitude on the part of the deputy, he would receive the assistance of provincial officials on his projects).

Investigation of the above relationships showed that the most frequent underlying causes of contention were the Phoenix Program, injustices in administration, demands for public works, availability of food and medical supplies, and corruption itself. Most of these problems were noted at the local level with each active deputy involved in from 500 to 1000 such cases per year. Mr. Goodman proposed that the above causes of contention will provide the impetus for future reform.

Mr. Goodman made several observations on the House as a new political factor in Vietnam. Members of the Lower House form a distinct elite group in South Vietnamese politics. They view themselves as a powerful minority, socially superior to their constituency, rather than as a representative body. The deputy is only involved in deputy-constituent relations in the district from which he is elected. This means that only twelve per cent of the people (an average of those who voted) receive most of the deputy's attention. This suggests that most active deputies are not trying to develop widespread political support nor to convert their electoral support into an expanding political organization. However, for the first time, the Viet Cong are perceived as the primary political enemy. The deputies see the necessity of uniting to fight the V.C. politically; nevertheless, they are not willing to consolidate under President Thieu's leadership. Mr. Goodman observed that the fractious nature of the Lower House is likely to persist, but if President Thieu were to develop a strong party this might in turn create a strong and united opposition party. In conclusion, the House of Representatives emerges as an institution potentially capable of contributing to political development and reform in South Vietnam.

Vietnam's External Resource Needs During the Next Five Years.

Leland Barrows reported on a study conducted under his leadership on the needs of the Vietnam economy during the next five years. The study was based on the following assumptions:

1. that the redeployment of U.S. troops and the Vietnamization program will have serious consequences for the Vietnamese economy;
2. that the United States will still be interested in a politically and economically viable South Vietnam;
3. that price increases per year must be held to thirty per cent during the U.S. withdrawal and fifteen per cent afterwards;
4. that imports will have to be significantly limited;
5. that there must be no significant reduction in the South Vietnamese standard of living; and
6. that there will be no radical restructuring of the taxation system.

The variables over which the United States has some control are:

1. the regulation of the rate of U.S. troop withdrawal; and
2. the wide variety of means available to assist South Vietnam, such as various types of aid programs.

The above assumptions and variables were used to construct three five-year scenarios which varied U.S. troop strength, aid programs, and GVN capabilities in order to arrive at some tentative conclusions concerning South Vietnamese economic requirements over the next five years. Diverse problems in the data made the study exceedingly difficult. These included the hopelessness of accurately forecasting levels of imports or inflation for the periods covered by these scenarios, and the difficulty of assessing the ARVN's ability to handle continuing problems of maintaining leadership and manpower in the face of desertions precipitated by United States withdrawal.

Despite the difficulties of accurate projection, Ambassador Barrows felt justified in the broad conclusion that a significant "economic squeeze" will be put on the Vietnamese people within the next five years. Given the relatively high economic status of Vietnam today compared to its immediate past, such a development may have serious internal political consequences. Maintenance of all the present programs in addition to Vietnamization will require more money than is likely to be available. In conclusion, the economic squeeze may occur sooner than expected with unanticipated consequences in a number of areas.

Council Business

Milton Sacks expressed concern for SEADAG's reputation within the academic community in light of recent charges by a former member and by Noam Chomsky in *The New York Review of Books*.

Wesley Fishel requested that the SEADAG questionnaires which had been distributed in connection with the proposed EARI documentation project be completed; so far, only twenty-five per cent of the questionnaires have been returned.

Ithiel de Sola Pool discussed SEADAG research possibilities in Vietnam. His reception there was generally favorable at most levels, both American and Vietnamese. There is interest in research at the village level. Topics for research which were of particular interest included: (1) the second round of village council elections, (2) the million piaster fund established for each village, and (3) the impact of the Vung Tau training program in the field.

Professor Pool noted that a number of Vietnamese scholars could be found to participate in research projects. A written report of this trip, dated December 16, 1969 is available from SEADAG.

Suggested topics for consideration at future meetings included rural development, recent military developments, land reform, and education. Rural development will be the subject of the next meeting which was tentatively scheduled for April 24, 1970.